

Social learning tools for mountain communities' resilience building: Reflecting on their potential integration in higher education for sustainable mountain development

Social learning tools that facilitate a process of knowledge co-production among diverse actors have proved useful to support resilience building and adaptation planning in highly vulnerable mountain areas. *Can such tools be integrated in higher education to foster students' capacities to contribute to more sustainable development pathways in mountains?*

“PLI” Module in Masters’ Curriculum:

In collaboration with the center AGRUCO of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the social learning tool “Promoting Local Innovations” was integrated into an interdisciplinary Master’s program on “Agroecology, Culture and Sustainable Endogenous Development” between 2007 and 2009.

Learning Outcomes:

Masters students...

- ... are able to explain mountain communities' context and dynamics from an interdisciplinary perspective (systems knowledge)
- ... perceive local stakeholders' perceptions and contribute with them to developing visions for the future (target knowledge)
- ... apply participatory planning tools and facilitation skills (transformation knowledge)

Social Learning:

Social learning can be defined as a change in understanding at an individual level that leads to a change in understanding at a broader social scale through social interactions and processes (Reed 2010).



Community-based **social learning modules** can lead to significant learning outcomes in **higher education for sustainable mountain development.**

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Participants achieve multiple learning outcomes in a relatively short time
- The training module also contributes to local development initiatives
- It requires important preparation and collaboration with local partners
- Intensive course that requires highly skilled facilitators

Promoting Local Innovations (PLI):

- PLI is a tool that aims at promoting local innovations and sustainable development, while developing social learning skills among the participants.
- 6-day workshop carried out in the context of a rural community;
20-30 participants including students, community members, traditional authorities, government representatives, rural extensionists, and NGOs;
- Interactive pedagogy and peer-to-peer learning
- On-the-job training in social learning facilitation skills

References and Further Reading:

- Mathez-Stiefel S.-L., Murti R. 2014. Promoting Local Innovations: a tool for adaptation to climate change and sustainable development in mountains. *World Mountain Forum*. 22-24 May 2014, Cusco, Peru.
- Mathez-Stiefel S.-L. 2017. *Agrobiodiversidad, clima y conocimientos tradicionales: Guía de taller de aprendizaje social*. Bern, Switzerland: Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, in collaboration with Bern Open Publishing (BOP). 31 p.
- Murti R., Mathez-Stiefel S.-L., Rist S. 2019. A methodological orientation for social learning based adaptation planning: Lessons from pilot interventions in rural communities of Burkina Faso, Chile and Senegal. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*.
- Reed M., Evelyn A., Cundill G., Fazey I., Glass J., Laing A., Newig J. et al. 2010. What is social learning? *Ecology and Society* 15 (4)
- Rist S., Mathez-Stiefel S.-L. and Bachmann F. 2009. Promoting Local Innovation (PLI) – A Tool for Promoting Local Innovation and Sustainable Rural Development. In: Christinck A., Gerster-Bentaya M., Hoffmann V. and Lemma M., editors. *Handbook for Rural Extension Volume II*. Weikersheim: Margraf Publishers. pp. 354-365.